



## In the Image of Love: Key Voices for Theological Anthropology

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### ABSTRACT

Love lies at the very heart of the Christian faith and its conception of both God and the human being. Nevertheless, the growing field of theological anthropology has yet to fully avail itself of philosophy's and theology's renewed attention to the theme of love. The Introduction to this special issue proposes the phrase 'in the image of Love' as an invitation to examine the relation between theological anthropology and love throughout the history of Christian thought. Guided by this motif, the issue's contributors consider ten historical thinkers on love and the human in relation to their philosophical conversation partners at the time. The volume thus has a genealogical dimension, delving into often forgotten layers beneath our current, late modern view of the human/love. It thereby assists future theological anthropological discussions in the much-needed task of both integrating the crucial theme of love and formulating more historically grounded perspectives. This special issue also reveals the ways in which theologians have attempted to respond to the challenge posed by the modern subject while retaining the idea that the human creature is called by Love and called to Love, and provides an alternative to Nygren's opposition of *agape* and *eros*.

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What does it mean to be created 'in the image of Love'?<sup>1</sup> This question will sound surprisingly unfamiliar to most theologians. Love lies at the very heart of the Christian faith: the Scriptures proclaim God as Love (1 John 4:8), and command love of God and one's neighbor above all else (Mk 12: 30–31). And yet there is little theological precedent for developing a direct link between the doctrine of the *imago dei* and the crucial identification of God as Love. Recent publications in the growing field of theological anthropology place little emphasis on the intrinsic connection between love and the human person<sup>2</sup>. Love's relative unimportance in the field of theological anthropology contrasts with the current rediscovery of the theme of love within both philosophy and theology at large<sup>3</sup>.

The present special issue hopes to fill this gap by bringing this general retrieval of the theme of love to bear on theological perspectives on the human person. It also intends to offer another stepping-stone toward overcoming the major challenge of any philosopher and theologian writing about love—namely to provide an alternative to Anders

Nygren's influential scheme, which in the 1930s opposed Christian love (*agape*) to philosophical love (*eros*)<sup>4</sup>. In this regard, the present project can be situated alongside Nicholas Wolterstorff's recent attempt at a Protestant retrieval of the notion of *caritas* in the face of what he describes as a pronounced 'Classical Modern Day Agapism'<sup>5</sup>. It also aligns with Roman Catholic efforts at seeking a less antagonistic view of eros and agape, for example by pleading for a theological rehabilitation and integration of *eros*<sup>6</sup> or through the retrieval of friendship (*philia*) as a kind of middle ground<sup>7</sup>. Aiming for a theological-anthropological focus and a holistic understanding of love, we embarked on the present project with the hypothesis that 'in the image of Love' is a valuable lens through which to examine different conceptualizations of love and the human person throughout history.

While other projects in contemporary theological anthropology typically focus on present-day challenges<sup>8</sup>, we take a fresh look at the *history* of theology and philosophy. Each essay in this volume approaches the theme of love and the human person by retrieving and creatively engaging with the thought of a key voice from within the Christian tradition (theologians, philosophers, spiritual writers from different denominational backgrounds). Our contributors pay close attention to the tensions, shifts, and conflicts at stake in a given author's thought on love and the human person. They do so by referencing their thinker's main *conversation partners*, which range from Plato and Aristotle to Nietzsche and German phenomenology. This reveals the impetuses theological conceptualizations of both love and the human person regularly received from philosophical strands of thought. It becomes apparent how debates about the nature of Christian love often served as a vehicle for grappling with changes in the parameters of human selfhood, and vice versa. Thus, in 'The Reciprocity of Spiritual Love in William of Saint-Thierry and Hadewijch,' John Arblaster and Paul Verdeyen bring to light the ways in which the spread of profane understandings of love as *amor* (the courtly love of the troubadours) challenged Christian understandings not only of love but also of the self. In 'A Paradigm of Permeability: Franz von Baader on Love,' Joris Geldhof shows how Baader proposes the structural anteriority of being affected/loved over against the epistemological assumptions of the Cartesian *cogito*. These are but two examples of how the volume as a whole highlights seminal moments in the development of Christian theological anthropology.

In selecting the ten *key figures* in this volume, we made a point of prioritizing voices that have received less scholarly attention despite having been distinctive of, or influential in, their time<sup>9</sup>. If we nonetheless included the well-known voices of Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, Kierkegaard, or Luther, our respective contributors challenge some of the clichés surrounding their views on love. In 'A Power that Deifies the Human and Humanizes God,' Luis J. Salés and Aristotle Papanikolaou propose an innovative interpretation of Maximus, which brings to light a surprising patristic appreciation of an Aristotelian anthropology of love. Our intention of opening up crucial but often neglected resources for a wider academic audience guided our preference, for instance, for William of Saint Thierry over Bernard of Clairvaux concerning the impetus of love mysticism, for Hadewijch over Dante regarding the Christian integration of Medieval courtly love, or for Franz X. von Bader over his friend Friedrich Schelling as a representative of nineteenth-century romanticism. For the twentieth century we deliberately eschewed a decision about which author

represents the most important voice on theological anthropology and love—Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, or Hans Urs von Balthasar. Instead, we selected two voices usually absent from encyclopedia articles on these topics, but which offer original views beyond the polarization typical for much of recent theology: Edith Stein and Chiara Lubich.

This combination of a broad scope of sources on the one hand, and innovative scholarship on well-known authors on the other, allows us to offer a well-grounded, *alternative historical narrative* to the standard Nygren-based account of the history of Christian love. In ‘Loving God in and through the Self: Trinitarian Love in St. Augustine,’ Matthew Drever explicitly debunks Nygren’s charges against Augustine by uncovering the complex relationship between Augustine’s theological view of Christian love and the Platonist notion of eros. In fact, among the theological and philosophical thinkers included in this thematic issue only François Fénelon aligns—more or less—with Nygren’s notion of Christian love. According to the interpretations in this volume, even usual ‘suspects’ like Luther and Kierkegaard are more balanced than commonly assumed. In ‘Martin Luther and Cajetan: Divinity,’ Antti Raunio defends the idea that Luther’s account of love involves respect for a careful distinction between philosophy and theology. Pia Søltoft shows in ‘Søren Kierkegaard and the Romantics: Passion’ that the Danish thinker has a unified understanding of love that transcends the schematic distinctions made by Nygren and C.S. Lewis.

This rejection of Nygren’s dichotomy does not mean that there is no real tension in the modern debate about Christian love. With the emergence of the philosophy of the subject in the seventeenth century, Fénelon defined Christian love as the denial of the desirous and autonomous modern self—even if, as Marc De Kesel shows in ‘Selfless Love: Pur amour in Fénelon and Malebranche,’ Fénelon unwittingly succumbs to the modern framework by opposing it<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, there is an antirationalist tendency in modern theologies of love, according to which love typically belongs to the realm of heart and will, at a clear distance from reason. In ‘Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche: Power/Weakness,’ Ekaterina Poljakova evokes the fundamental irrationality of Christian love in the eyes of the modern mind. It is no coincidence that this issue’s nineteenth-century attempts at writing about Christian love—Dostoyevsky, von Baader, and Kierkegaard—all adopt more narrative literary forms (such as the novel, the diary, or the essay), instead of the common genre of a theological or philosophical tract.

We have chosen to represent the twentieth century through two thinkers who, writing in the wake of these modern tensions, aim at a renewed integration of love, or a notion of love at once unified and differentiated. Both Edith Stein and Chiara Lubich are major spiritual writers—and, as such, draw on the profound existential experience of being a person ‘in the image of Love.’ Each of them goes beyond the modern framework and offers a constructive theological anthropology of love. In ‘“I Look at Him and He Looks at me”: Stein’s Phenomenological Analysis of Love,’ Claudia Mariéle Wulf shows how, by turning toward phenomenology, Stein attempted to develop a philosophically respectable notion of love that is both well ordered (retrieving, in a sense, the traditional *ordo amoris*) and drawing upon the richness of premodern sources. In ‘The Unity of Reciprocal Love: The Charism of Chiara Lubich and the Theology of Klaus Hemmerle,’ Piero Coda elaborates how Lubich rooted her radically relational (or communal) view of love in a Biblical and mystical theology of the

Trinity—thereby bringing love to the center of late modern theological anthropology, which tended to focus rather upon reason or freedom<sup>11</sup>.

The question underlying—and in that sense unifying—all of the contributions in this issue is ‘What is love and who is the being who loves?’. The answers to this question are strikingly diverse. As indicated in many of the articles’ titles, love has come to be conceptualized in many different ways in the Part I course of the Christian tradition, ranging from ‘virtue’ to ‘passion’ and ‘unity.’ At the same time, the historical trajectory of our collection also highlights how ‘old’ or discarded understandings of love and the human person continually resurface on new grounds. This becomes obvious, for instance, with regard to the question of human passion or emotion. Its role in ‘true’ love is constantly reevaluated and redefined. Likewise, love’s relation to human acts, as well as its relative individuality or commonality, receives continually new interpretations.

Intrinsically linking human and divine love, our rephrasing of the traditional *imago dei* motif as ‘in the image of love’ provides an antidote to the recurring tendency to discuss love in relation *either* to God *or* to the human being. Our contributors’ attempts at penetrating the meaning of Christian love in this twofold way bring to the fore issues that a more one-sided approach would tend to overlook. These include, for instance, the critical question of human agency and identity formation: by whose actions does the individual become fully him- or herself, or saved, and what does such a state consist in? Is it best described in terms of humanization or in terms of deification? A similarly important question is that of reciprocity or mutuality in love: Is a genuine exchange between God and the human being possible, and what shape would such an exchange have to take to possess salvific power? Does Christian love necessarily entail sacrifice, and how does this relate to questions of mercy and forgiveness? As our authors will show, these and other questions with which the various historical figures wrestled are often of immediate relevance to contemporary debates about the human being’s relative autonomy or relationality, about the existence of an immortal soul and the relative porosity of the human self, about the relation between goodness and selflessness, and about the self-fulfillment proffered by true love.

In this special issue, then, a diverse group of highly original scholars revisits some of Christian theology’s oldest questions by taking a fresh and contemporary look at the Christian tradition. The contributors move beyond familiar voices and narratives and pay special attention to the idea that the human being is created/redeemed ‘in the image of Love.’ The result, we are convinced, is a vibrant and multifaceted picture of love. This not only provides theological anthropology today with a deeper historical grounding but also brings love to the center of its attention.

## Notes

1. This special issue is the fruit of an expert seminar organized by the research group *Anthropos* (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven), held in Leuven, 11–12 December 2015.
2. Cf. Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*; Ross, *Anthropology*; and Schwartz, *The Human Being*.
3. See for instance, in theology: Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*; Oord, *The Nature of Love*; Davis, *The Weight of Love*; in philosophy: Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*; Ferry, *On Love*; Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*; Hanley, *Love’s Enlightenment*, among others.

4. See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*; den Bok, “‘Breng in mij de liefde op orde,’” 334–350.
5. See Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*.
6. Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* Part I; See also Burrus and Keller (eds.), *Toward a Theology of Eros*.
7. Cf. Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*; Pope Francis, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), nos. 120–141.
8. Cf. Boeve, De Maeseneer, and Van Stichel (eds.), *Questioning the Human*; Farris and Taliaferro (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Theological Anthropology*; Jones and Barbeau (eds.), *The Image of God in an Image Driven Age*.
9. Bernard Brady has already provided an excellent overview of the well-known authors on Christian love. See Brady, *Christian Love*.
10. As a more mainstream theological voice revelatory of the shift in theological anthropology and the theology of love, we could have chosen Duns Scotus. Emmanuel Falque recently presented Scotus as a thinker expressing love—human and divine—as the event of singularizing the human person in his or her unique individuality. Falque hereby suggests a different genealogy of the modern individual, a new anthropology of the self, which can be theologically valorized in a positive way. See Falque, *God, the Flesh, and the Other*, Ch. 9.
11. Cf. Pröpper, *Theologische Anthropologie*; David Kelsey made a major innovative proposal for a radically relational approach, in Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, which does treat ‘love,’ especially in the second volume.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

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